

Health Care Workers and HIV

You are at risk of getting HIV if you come in direct contact with blood or other body fluids. Protect yourself from risks. Know what to do in an emergency, and how to report an exposure.

Who is responsible for protecting you from HIV?

- It is your employer's responsibility to give you accurate information about blood borne diseases and to provide appropriate protective equipment.
- It is your responsibility to carry out procedures, such as universal precautions, that minimize your health risk.

Take steps to protect yourself

- Wash your hands with soap and water: after using the bathroom; between patients; and after handling specimens.
- Get vaccinated for Hepatitis A and Hepatitis B.
- Go to annual trainings on blood borne diseases provided by your employer.
- Learn the safety procedures and universal precautions in your workplace.
- Know which tasks might bring you into contact with blood or body fluids and take precautions.
- Make it a point to learn your employer's written exposure plan before you need to use it.

Using universal precautions can lower your risk

Universal precautions are methods for treating all human blood and other body fluids as if they are contaminated and infectious. Health care workers can avoid direct contact with blood and body fluids by using universal precautions and following safety procedures for the handling of sharps.

- Use gloves in an emergency, or whenever you may come in contact with blood or body fluid. Discard gloves after each patient or specimen contact and wash your hands.

- Use additional protective gear if you are a first responder or a worker in frequent contact with blood and body fluids. This may include wearing gloves, eyewear, face shield, apron, lab coat, or shoe covers.
- Put all contaminated equipment and disposable items in appropriately labeled containers before leaving the work area.

What is an “exposure?”

This means that blood, semen, vaginal fluid, or other potentially infectious materials, came into contact with an employee’s eye, mouth, mucous membrane, or non-intact skin while performing their job.

Know what to do if you are exposed to HIV

If you come in contact with blood or body fluids without gloves or other protective gear, you may need immediate medical treatment.

- Wash the affected area with soap and water as soon as possible.
- Report the exposure or suspected exposure to your supervisor, employee health program, or a hospital emergency room.
- Call your physician or go to an emergency room as soon as possible, especially for a needle stick injury. It is important to receive early medical treatment if you need it.
- Record the details about the accident by noting the time, place, type and amount of fluid, and how the accident happened.
- Report a needle stick injury to your local or state health department.

HIV

Human Immunodeficiency Virus

Causes

AIDS

Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome

HIV is found in the blood, semen, vaginal fluids, or breast milk of someone infected with HIV.

Blood and body fluids may carry harmful bacteria or viruses, including HIV. You are at risk for getting HIV or other blood borne viruses, such as Hepatitis B or C, on the job from:

- direct contact with infected blood or body fluids.
- needle stick injuries.
- injuries from other sharp objects or instruments.

Protect yourself – get immunized! HBV, the virus that causes Hepatitis B, is also carried in human blood and body fluids. HBV is spread the same way as the HIV virus, but a vaccine is available.

Resources for health care workers

AIDS Action Committee Hotline
1-800-235-2331 (English, Spanish)
TTY: 617-437-1672

Information, support, and referrals on HIV/AIDS, STDs, and Hepatitis transmissions, testing, and treatment

Workplace Safety and Health,
OSHA Region I Office
617-565-9860

Information on federal guidelines and regulations about workplace safety and health, and fact sheets on blood borne diseases.

CDC National HIV/AIDS Hotline,
1-800-342-2437
TTY: 1-800-243-7889

Information on HIV and AIDS.

Get Tested. Get Care. Get Support.

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